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A Year of Struggle:

Excerpts from a Farmer's Diary, 1936

CO-EDITED BY

H. ROGER GRANT AND L. EDWARD PURCELL

Iowans who lived on farms during the Great Depression undoubtedly remember 1936 as one of the most difficult years of their lives. The severe economic dislocations of the Depression left many ill-prepared to face a year of brutal weather.

One Iowa farmer caught in the 1930s cycle of low prices, debt, and bad weather was Elmer G. Powers. Elmer lived on a 160 acre farm in Boone County, near the village of Beaver. He became owner of the farm (he had been a tenant since 1908) following the death of his father in 1933. The land was heavily mortgaged to an eastern insurance company, and it was only with the assistance of New Deal relief programs such as the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) and the Federal Land Bank that Elmer managed to hold on to his property.

Elmer's story was similar to many others in the Midwest. What set him apart was his passion for diary-keeping.

Every evening from 1931 until his death in 1942, Elmer drew his battered Oliver typewriter to the fading summer light or the warm winter stove and pecked out several hundred words of personal record and observance, based on shorthand notes taken during the day's work. The result of his nightly labors was a massive farm diary—more than 2,500 typewritten pages in all. Elmer began the diary at the urging of Donald Murphy, then associate editor of *Wallaces' Farmer* magazine. Small sections were published in the farm periodical, but most of the diary remained intact and unread after Murphy deposited the typescript in the Manuscript Collec-

tion of the State Historical Society in 1953. An edited version of the diary for the years 1931 to 1936 was published recently by the Iowa State University Press as *Years of Struggle: The Farm Diary of Elmer G. Powers, 1931-1936* (co-edited by H. Roger Grant and L. Edward Purcell, copyright 1976 by the Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa) and excerpts from 1936 are presented here through the courtesy of the Press.

Elmer entered 1936 with cautious optimism. The relief programs of the Roosevelt administration had provided cash income for farmers like Elmer through the AAA. Elmer, for example, received payments for cutting back his production of corn and hogs. Not only did the payments see farmers through a difficult period, but the decreased production shortened the supply of farm products, allowing the market prices to rise. Elmer anticipated that a good crop in 1936, sold at prevailing prices, would allow him a modest measure of personal recovery.

Unfortunately, the fates conspired to crush the optimistic hopes of Elmer and his fellow Iowa farmers. The first months of 1936 were the fiercest winter weather in many years. Storm after storm swept across the state, leaving huge drifts and blocked roads in their wake. For many Iowans, isolated on farmsteads and already worn down by the previous hard years, the weather proved to be an awesome foe. There was, of course, nothing unusual about snow and cold weather in Iowa, but because of the thin resources caused by the Depression, farmers were low on feed for livestock and groceries for them-

selves. In addition, many farmers had dropped telephone service because of lack of income, thus making farmsteads even more isolated. Finally, the problem of clearing roads was made more difficult by the poor quality equipment used by the county, likely a result of low tax revenues.

SUN., JAN. 19

A very cold day today. Fifteen below zero this morning. By noon this thermometer stood at zero and at chore time this evening ten above. We were indoors all day excepting when taking care of the stock. It is hard work to care for livestock and poultry when the weather is so cold.

Community activities are almost at a standstill. Our farm ladies attended church services in the village [Beaver] church this evening and reported an attendance of 26 persons.

The snowplow, working on nearby roads, today, got as far as Jim's place [a neighbor] and found the drifts too deep for it to handle. Several years ago when

the snow was deep, plows were in operation day and night until the roads were clear, but this year they are not working so steadily.

While I was at home alone this evening I happened to look out of the window and saw a dark red light on the sky. I knew it would mean only one thing, a farm fire and very likely a farm house. Using the phone I learned that a farm house was being destroyed. The ladies returned from church about that time and Bill [Elmer's brother] and I drove as near the farm as we could get and walked the remaining distance. The snowplow had not been on nearby roads. The fire had started from a defective flue and the entire home destroyed. A few things were saved from the lower story, but the upper story and basement things were lost. Fortunately the wind was blowing away from the other farm buildings and they were not lost. Only a few neighbors were aware of the fire or able to get to the unfortunate farm.



The Elmer Powers farmstead as it is today. Elmer's grandson Dennis and his family still live in the modest house, built in the late 1870s by Elmer's grandfather.



Elmer, his son Daniel (D. L.), daughter Lillian, and wife Minnie. The family struck this self-conscious pose for the camera in the late 1920s (courtesy Powers Family).

SAT., JAN. 25

Just out[side] of our community a farm house was left without a mother today. There are four children, from one to 14 years of age. Three boys and one girl. The flu, the severe weather, no phone, and the bad roads were a combination that took a very much needed farm wife and mother. This is one of the saddest farm tragedies that has come to my notice.

SUN., JAN. 26

Another farm home burned yesterday forenoon. There are more than the average number of farm fires the past few weeks. I am rather inclined to blame the house fires on the women folks and farm barn fires on the men. Just a little more care and attention and these things could be avoided in many cases.

MON., FEB. 3

The bad weather continued today, in fact it became much worse. A northeast wind was blowing and the thermometer was below zero this morning. Later in the forenoon the wind shifted to the north and light snow began to fall. This snow began to fall faster and heavier and by dinner time we were having the ugliest blizzard of the season.

Living is becoming rather a problem for many farm folks. As the years have gone by more and more farm people have been depending on the stores in town for their living or a greater part of it at least. Now with blocked roads the groceries etc., soon run low. Fuel is a problem for some and feed for the stock for others. The days continue to go by without any warm, thawy

weather. Apparently there isn't to be any let up of the cold weather until spring comes.

TUES., FEB. 4

For the past several nights I have been sleeping in a reclining chair until midnight, then going to the barn to look after the stock, but last night I did not go to the barn in the night and this morning I found a new calf. As the thermometer registered 20 below I took the calf to the basement and will keep it there until we have warmer weather. Our barn is not warm enough for these new arrivals this winter.

SAT., FEB. 8

Yesterday afternoon and last evening the weather was quite good compared to what we had been having, but some time

in the night last night the wind turned to the northwest and this morning we were having what turned out to be the worst blizzard of the season and one of the worst for many years. The wind blew harder, more snow fell, and the drifts piled higher and the cold was more intense than any storm that I can remember of. We thought that the storm would quiet by evening but it did not and in fact became worse, the wind blowing harder.

SUN., FEB. 9

Stormy weather all day today, and we were at home all day too. After I had finished work with the stock I spent my spare time reading and looking up weather statistics. Going back over the history of this particular farm I find there have been many unusual instances and many varia-



Elmer and a team in 1920. The large barn remains on the farm, although altered in later years. (courtesy Powers Family).

tions. I am the third generation of the same family that has been here during the past 60 years and I can recall and recollect the things my father and also my grandfather talked about in connection with the weather. Droughts, floods, unseasonable warm and unusually cold and numerous unequalities have followed one another with a regularity that we soon forget until we begin looking into the past.

With so many of the highways and the roads closed with snow each farm is almost compelled to look after itself. First of all we are all very careful about fires, then accidents, and lastly our water supply for the livestock. Our stoves, lights, and wiring are attended to very carefully because if a fire should start it would mean disaster. Then we think, move, and act with particular care to avoid accidents. We would not get to a doctor and he could not get to us, so we are careful all of the time. Lastly we watch the pump very carefully. Our well is a four-inch casing and if the pump breaks we could not draw water with a bucket and could not get to town for repairs.

MON., FEB. 10

We must get to town tomorrow. Two weeks ago something went wrong with the light plant [a wind-powered generator]. Several days later the high test gas was all gone for the lantern, then the kerosene was [nearly] all gone, and we used one kerosene lamp. The same way with the groceries. Flour, sugar, coffee, tea, soap, matches, etc., were nearly all or entirely used up and we kept eating something else from the canned meat and fruit from the cellar. And many of our neighbors are not getting on as well as we are.

TUES., FEB. 11

Cold weather again today. We drove



*Elmer and Minnie on their wedding day, 1908
(courtesy Powers Family).*

the car to where we quit scooping on the road last evening and began working again and by noontime we met a bunch of neighbors coming from the other way and our roads are open again. Every day I phone to the county supervisor in charge of our part of the county, about the progress the snowplows are making, and he tells of the broken and disabled machinery and the tired crews of men who are working with them.

We drove to town [Ogden] this after-

noon and returned late this evening. We drove in a round-about way to get to town. We had broken and loaned all of our scoop shovels and drove to town without any way to scoop out with. In town I found that the county had bought all of the shovels, but three had come from a wholesale house at noon and I bought one of them. At the grocery store I bought a large supply of groceries and had them charged. The first time I did not pay cash for years and years. Business is at a standstill. Crews of men and tractors working to keep [coal] mine roads open. Little dabs of coal trickle out to towns and families. No school anywhere. Doctors getting to patients in bobsleds and walking. No favorable weather in sight. Altogether one of the worst situations we have ever had. We have another new calf and I carried it to the basement right away.

WED., FEB. 12

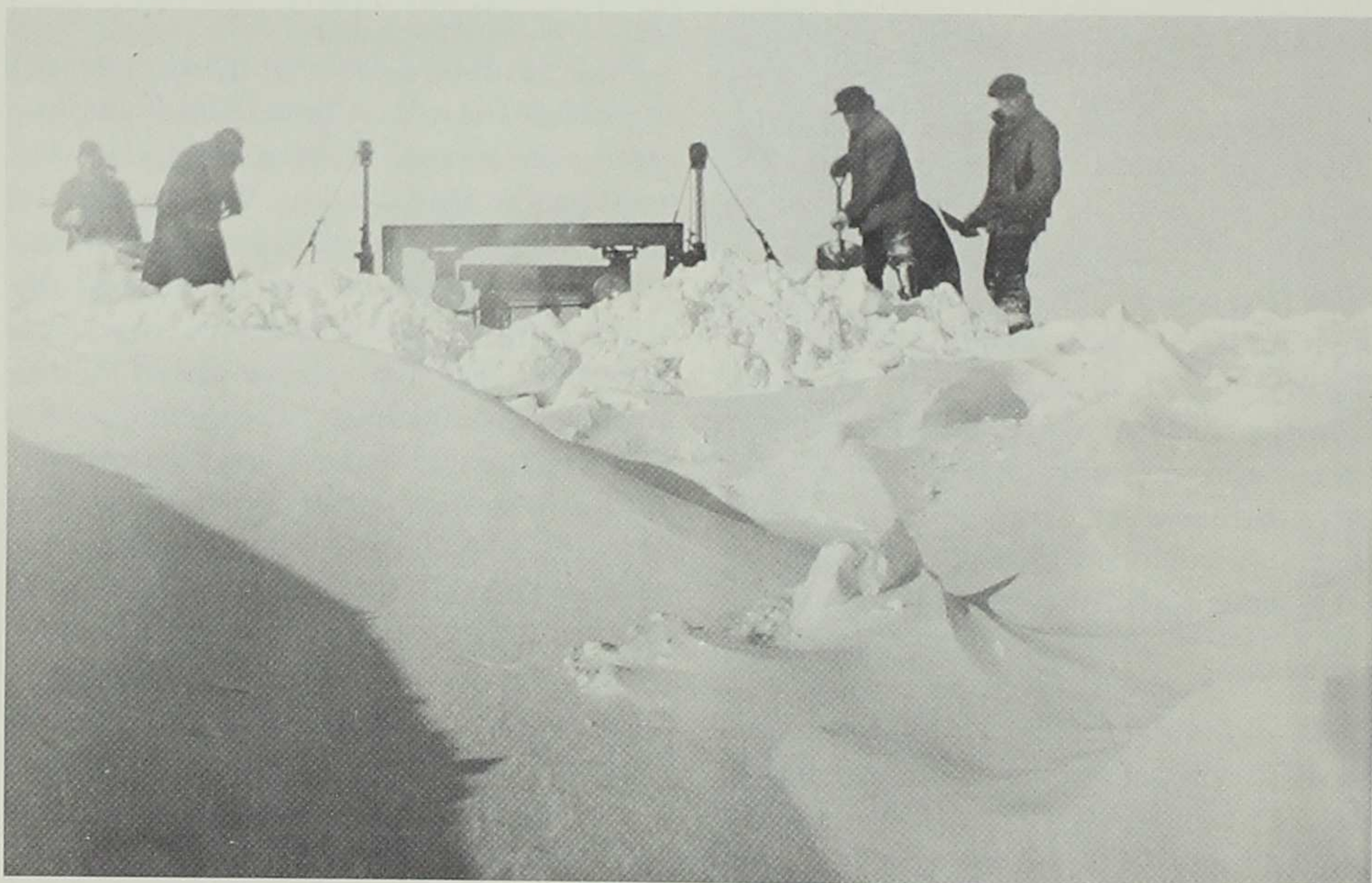
Another of those discouraging winter days that we have been having so many of this winter. There is more snow and deeper snow than our oldest residents can remember of. Everyone has been hoping and praying for days for a break in the severely cold weather and a let-up of the snow fall, but it does not come. Life is a problem of existence until spring. Groceries and food for the people and fuel to keep them warm, then feed for the livestock, which is gradually getting weaker and thinner. Many farmers who must move this spring are selling their cattle. Others who have sufficient feed but cannot get it to the stock are selling them. Our hogs have been penned in the hog barn for weeks, because they would walk on the drifts, over the fences, if they were outside.

SAT., FEB. 15

Today will be a day that many of us will remember for a long time. The snowplow came over a part of our roads today. We were on the road all day. We made every effort to keep it traveling as much as possible and all of the men on our three miles of road were out to meet the plow and shovel out the bad places ahead of the machine. We did keep it traveling steadily, only we stopped for coffee one time and for lunch another time. At one place in the road where drifts were very deep we took the machine through the fields and this brought it close to our place, where we stopped for the first time, for hot coffee. Then we continued and by noon we were at Jack's place [a neighbor] where a short stop was made for dinner. Then on again where we met 15 men who were to work with our ten, but these men seemed to rather stand and watch the machine than work to help it. We finally turned on a road where the snow was very deep and as a snow storm was coming up the outfit was turned around and taken back to town. The eight families on our three and a half miles of road consist of exactly 40 people. Our men worked like veterans and were always ahead of the machine scooping the deepest snow. They continued on past their own farms. I am of the opinion that if the men farther on the road would have been more inclined to assist, the plow crew would have continued on farther.

TUES., FEB. 25

Our road has been open for cars for several days, but there are many roads in the community still blocked with drifted snow and a new snowplow came in this morning and did a little work near us so that the school bus would have a better road, then went on to clear other roads.



Clearing a country road in front of the snowplow, winter 1936.

This new plow is a four-wheel drive truck, with a plow on it. I learned that it cost the county \$6,500 and the plow is extra. The truck gives it a faster traveling speed than the crawler type of tractor, and it does very well plowing in slow speed. We had one stretch of 50 rods of snow, five feet deep, with a thick frozen crust on top of it and the outfit nosed its way through this 50 rods in 40 minutes, then galloped on to another place. The old plow we used last week is said to be wrecked beyond repair. Now the community is preparing to resume normal activities again.

THUR., FEB. 27

The wind had stopped blowing this morning and we are going about the business of working ourselves out of the results of another blizzard. The thermometer did not get down to zero this time and by

mid-afternoon the sun came out but it did not thaw very much.

I worked around the place this forenoon and found drifts as high or higher than any we have had yet. I phoned to the highway tool shed and learned that all roads are drifted quite badly again and that it will be a long time before they can be all plowed out. The plows will attempt to get to farms where sickness and moving need first attention.

WED., MAR. 4

This evening we learned that the big snowplow had been repaired and was out of town for a short trial run, then it was headed our way. I phoned all of the farmers on our road and a few of the first of us met it. As we progressed down the road we continued to pick up men until we had 21 of them. Sometimes we rode on the back of the truck and when necessary

worked ahead of it, breaking out the heavy crust or shoveling the deeper drifts. Then when we were through and to a clear road we all loaded on and traveled at a fast speed to the next drift. Around midnight we turned the plow around and began working back nearer home, dropping off farmers as we passed their place. At one thirty o'clock we came to Jim's farm. There was only Jim, Hank, D.L. [Elmer's son] and myself and the crew of two men left and we went in to Jim's for lunch and coffee. We almost had to lift the driver down from the cab. He had been driving for more than ten hours.

THUR., MAR. 5

After lunch we left Jim's place and continued on, clearing the remaining distance on Jim's road. Then D. L. and I came home and went to bed at three o'clock this morning. Jim and Hank went home and the plow continued on alone. When I had finished the chores at eight o'clock and

phoned the county shed to report our night's work, the plow wasn't in yet at that time.

We will all remember last night. Early in the evening all of the men were in good spirits and jolly. Every farm house was lighted and our progress closely watched by the farm ladies and the children. However, along toward midnight, after we had toiled through many deep drifts and the men and plow crew were very tired and the weather had turned very cold it wasn't nearly so pleasant. Many of the men did not have their heavy coats along and some of them became chilled. Several times we came very near to having a bad accident and someone seriously injured. At one place we took the plow over a long stretch of flooded roadway. The plow was one of the new modern four-wheel drive truck outfits and worked very efficiently. When we men rode in the truck box we were with a load of barrels and miscellaneous



Scooping out, winter 1936.

tools and gear, and after midnight this seemed a very uncomfortable place to ride. Working in the very deep drifts seemed better than riding in the load.

This afternoon we were all rested and many of us went to town and began to take up our community and private affairs again. I saw the first robin of the season today.

The robin was a good omen. The snows ended, and Elmer moved on to spring plowing and planting. Because of the late season, the work was hurried, and Elmer expressed uneasiness about the future. In January, the United States Supreme Court had ruled that the Agricultural Adjustment Administration was unconstitutional, so farmers like Elmer entered the new growing season uncertain about the role of the federal government in support of farming, even though Congress had passed the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act less than two months after the Court's invalidation of the AAA. The new program called for farmers to take part of their land out of production by planting grasses or legumes instead of commercial crops. The idea was to cut production and rebuild depleted soils through a long-term conservation program. Farmers were to receive cash bounties for participation in the program. In the long run, the soil conservation concept worked, probably better than had the AAA, but in the midst of the Depression, farmers were nervous about the change.

Although the spring months passed relatively smoothly for Elmer, the growing season proved to be disastrous. By the end of May, farmers in Elmer's vicinity were having trouble with heat, blowing dust, and lack of moisture in the soil. Elmer realized how important the crop would be when he wrote in early June: "Nature must be very kind to the corn crop this season if we are to have plenty of it. And a farmer has a sacred obligation to produce, if not abundantly,

at least sufficiently, for the needs of his nation." Unfortunately, Nature was not kind. As June wore on, the accustomed rains failed to materialize. To make matters worse, plagues of grasshoppers invaded Iowa. The drought of 1936 was a time of trial for Elmer and his fellow Iowa farmers.

FRI., JUNE 26

Another day of drought and heat, until evening, when dark clouds gathered, but only a light rain fell. Not enough to settle the dust.

Our field work, today, was cultivating corn and I thought several times when I was in the field, that there were more chances of injuring the crop than benefiting it by cultivating at this time, if the weather should continue dry and warm.

SAT., JUNE 27

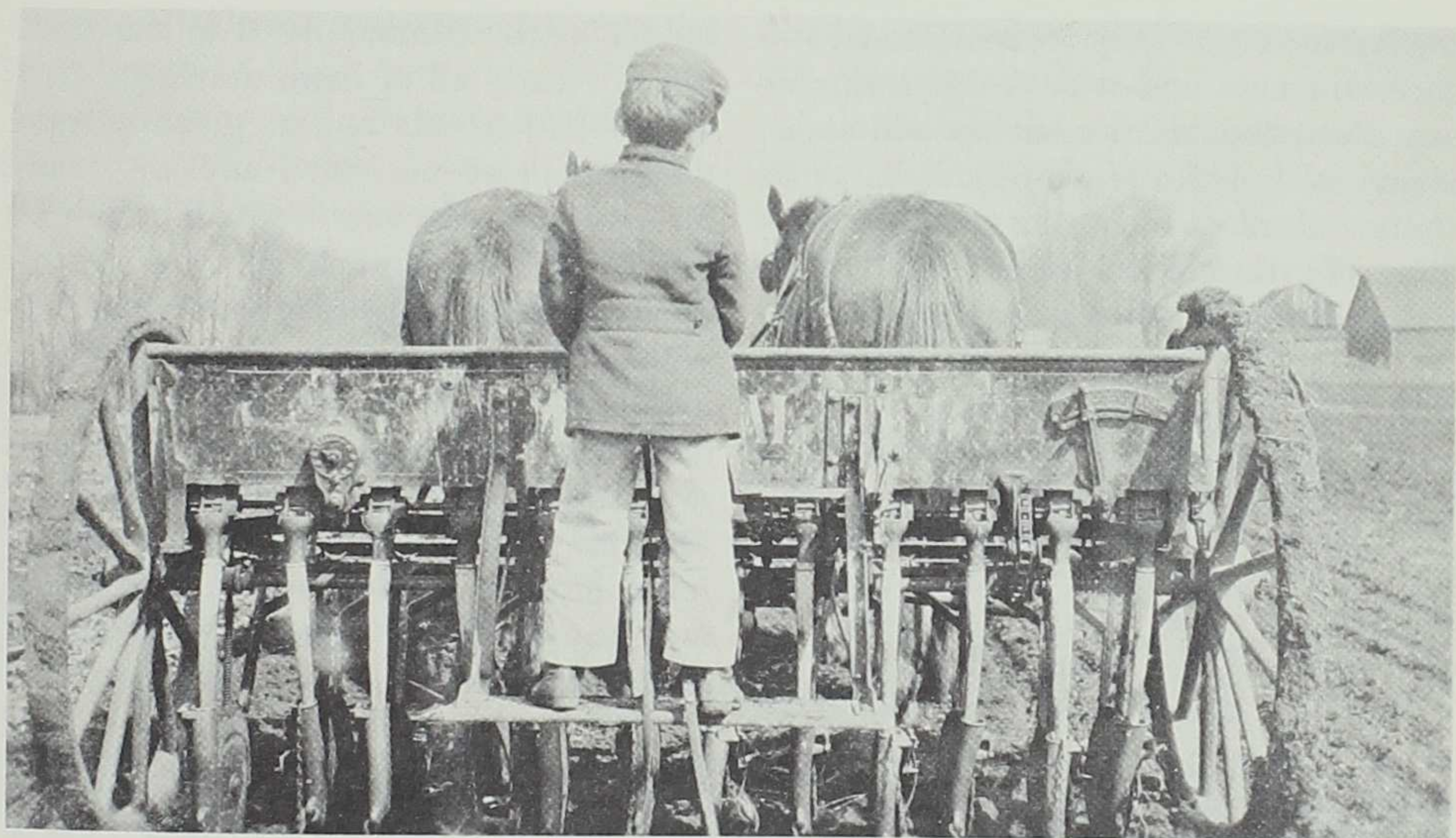
The heat in our corn fields today was very intense. The corn rolled badly. The pastures are rapidly turning a deep burned brown in color. I do not know just what effect the heat will have on the oats crop at this time.

MON., JUNE 29

At 10:30 this forenoon there were so many [grass]hoppers in the corn field that I looked at my watch to note the time of our first general invasion. I do not look for very many of them, or for much damage by them, but they are here, much thicker than I have ever seen them before. Perhaps they are passing, or were blown in[to] the community by the wind. However, if they are the advance guard of hordes to follow it will be bad.

TUES., JUNE 30

The weather was hot and dry again to-



D. L. seeding a field with a horse-drawn drill, circa 1922. Because of the financial pinch of the Depression, Elmer retained the methods of farming by horsepower well into the late 1930s (courtesy of the Powers Family).

day and all grain markets continue a little higher. Our small grain is beginning to suffer. There isn't any moisture in the soil to sustain them and the intense heat is turning the heads white rather than ripening them in the natural way. Our horses continue to work despite the heat. We water and rest them frequently and work them short days.

THUR., JULY 2

Corn cultivation was our field work again today. We work in the fields and look around the landscape. What is going to become of it? The corn plants look thrifty but we know they are not growing the foundation for a crop that they should. Sufficient moisture is not available, though there is abundant heat.

I attended the community sale again this afternoon. The usual offering of livestock came through the ring, but it went out at substantially lowered values. The heat in and around the sale barn was intense. It had a depressing effect on all. A common expression among the farmers was "Well this will finish the oats." Many farmers in that community were cutting and storing their oats crop for whatever hay it might make, believing that the heat and drought had ruined it for grain purposes. The farmers in attendance at this sale were a serious minded crowd of men. Market news was closely watched and discussed. All grains advanced again today. Small groups of men were in serious discussion as to the best way to meet the

coming situation. They are bewildered and uncertain now and will be for a day or two. But plans and leadership will come. Many are hopeful of rain in the next 36 hours and all of them did not think anything like this could happen again. The corn crop is still safe for a few days.

SUN., JULY 5

The drought and heat continues. Dry hot winds were blowing from the southwest again this afternoon. This was very bad for the corn and especially bad for the oats. It seems to me that the potato crop here must be entirely dried up.

Late this afternoon I drove the truck to my brother-in-law's place and borrowed enough iron pipe to reach from the wind-mill pump to our garden and will pump water on the garden all night. We do not expect to water all of the garden, but may save some of it. The vegetables that will be most useful for canning purposes.

Not a chance for rain tonight. We are studying the problem of what is best for us to do with our oats crop.

MON., JULY 6

This afternoon we began cutting [oats]. I found the grain just a little different than any I had ever handled before. Many of the straws had been cut off by grasshoppers. Also many were broken over. I do not know what threshing returns will be. The ground in the oats field is very dry and hard. The binder jolts along and is rough riding. Great cracks are in the ground. I could drop my pliers down out of sight in many of these cracks. I am pulling the binder with horses. Almost every

binder in the community is in the fields today. Nearly all of them drawn by tractors. Whether oats appear green or ripe, they are being harvested anyway. Many farmers have a feeling they will be as well in the shock as standing. Also the general opinion seems to be that one would do better not to cultivate any corn now. Our wind mill pumped into the garden all day today. We are making an effort to save the garden if possible. Reports are that all grains advanced again today. Many farm fires are occurring. Both buildings and fields are burning. No rain in sight tonight.

THUR., JULY 9

The oats continue to dry up and I think I will finish the harvesting as soon as I possibly can. The earth is dry and hard and many large cracks are appearing in the stubble field. Any tools that I carry on the binder may be dropped down in these cracks. I tied a string on the handle of a 12 in. crescent wrench and lowered it down a crack. I will not mention the distance. Some things are better left unsaid, even about a drought.

A farm house burned today. From another nearby community comes the story of a 20 acre field of oats being devoured by grasshoppers during one day's time.

SUN., JULY 12

Today is the tenth consecutive day that the thermometer has registered above the 100 mark. The reading today was 105. There are newspaper and radio forecasts of approaching rain but I fail to see any indications of them. Our various weather

instruments do not indicate any rain in the near future.

I walked around the place some today and wherever I went I found the grass crackled and crushed under my feet as I walked. I can recall several times when we had a severe drought but I do not recall anything as bad as this.

Our livestock and poultry are standing the extreme heat much better than the growing crops. This present drought covers more territory than perhaps any other on record.

TUES., JULY 14

More heat again today. The 12th con-

secutive day above 100 degrees, reaching 108 this afternoon.

I drove into the city this afternoon and it was the most disagreeable trip I ever made as far as the heat was concerned. At every filling station I found travelers with burned faces and some of them nearly overcome with the heat.

Fires continue to be one of the great hazards of the dry weather. Today I saw a place where a fire had apparently started by the highway and burned across a pasture and several rods in a corn field before it had been extinguished. There isn't very much moisture in some of the corn plants.



Iowa corn in the 1930s, photographed by the federal Work Projects Administration.

It seems strange to think of what seems to be a green cornfield burning.

SUN., JULY 19

The greatest corn crop disaster that our country has ever experienced is upon us. It may take some little time yet for the fact to become apparent to all of the citizens to grasp the idea and some of them may miss it entirely, but all of them will know eventually that something is wrong some place.

Clouds gathered in the northwest this afternoon and a very light shower of rain fell here. Hardly enough to wash the dust from the shrinking corn. And the thing we have been worrying about happened. We knew that the corn plants were not developing normally and when the wind that accompanied the sprinkle of rain came along it blowed the corn over nearly to the ground. Perhaps the flattest I ever saw corn blown down. Many hills of corn were hardly rooted and these tipped right over, loosening the plants in the dry soil. Many stalks are broken off several inches above the ground too. The wind damage to the crop amounts to much more than the small amount of moisture benefits. Our oats shocks are blown every which way, but this is not a damage, just an inconvenience.

THUR., JULY 30

The dry, discouraging weather continues and each day seems more hopeless than the one just passed. I hitched to the mower and mowed along the fences, around the stubble fields. The few weeds and scattered grass are quite dry and dead

but I thought the field would look better this way.

TUES., AUG. 4

The grain markets broke badly today. Scattered showers were reported as the reason. There is much speculation in the grain business. The producers and the consumers and their rights and interests are entirely ignored in the matter. Cash corn went down seven cents. I am still holding mine in the belief that when the crop disaster is fully known that corn will sell at around \$1.25 cents per bushel. That amount will pay my notes at the bank and my Land Bank payment. Then too I am testing my corn to see if it will do for seed. In a day or two I should know about this.

I drove to town this afternoon. Quite a few farm folks were in town this afternoon. Farming is changing again. So many farms have passed into the hands of banks and insurance companies that the people living on them do not have anything to do but the actual farming of them, and because of the drought they won't have much to do but the fall plowing. Corn husking will be a short job this year.

Finally, on September 5, a two-inch rainfall broke the drought. The 1936 crop, however, was lost. Elmer's eventual corn yield was a mere 12 to 15 bushels per acre. Because of the anticipated nationwide shortage of grain, the market price for corn rose sharply during the late summer and early fall, and Elmer hoped to recover some of his losses by selling corn he had on hand from the previous year's crop. During the fall of 1935, Elmer had sealed much of his crop in cribs under the aegis of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), one of the New Deal "alphabet"

agencies. The CCC loaned money to farmers on grain sealed and held off the market. The original loan price was 45¢ a bushel, so the higher prices of 1936 could have meant a good profit. Elmer counted on this money to help meet his mortgage payments on the farm. During 1936, Elmer had switched his mortgage from a private insurance company to the federally subsidized Land Bank, a move which lowered his payments. Alas, as his diary narrates, Elmer's luck was bad.

TUES., SEPT. 8

When I had finished the morning work I went to the radio and listened to the opening grain market quotations. Then I drove to the village elevator and found that I could sell the corn for Saturday's price which was \$1.00½ for grade No. 2, and I thought by sorting the corn some as we shelled it we could make it this grade. Crossing the street to the garage I met the sheller operator and learned that he could shell the corn this afternoon if I sold it now. And going back to the elevator I sold 1300 bushels. Last December we had

sealed 1375 bushels but I thought it would shrink perhaps a hundred bushels anyway.

The sheller came after dinner and we began shelling. Our truck and the truck with the sheller hauled the corn to town. Several neighbors whom I had exchanged work with and who now owed me work shoveled the corn from the crib and during the shoveling sorted out any discolored ears of corn they happened to see.

We finished the shelling in several hours and the sheller operator and some of the neighbors thought there was around 50 bushels of corn that we had thrown out as unfit to sell and corn that might spoil the grading of it. Later in the afternoon when I drove to the elevator I learned that only 1025 bushels of shelled corn had come in. That quantity, with the 50 bushels we had thrown out made a total of 1075 bushels. Leaving a shortage of exactly 300 bushels. Certainly it had not dried out and shrunk that much.

WED., SEPT. 9

This morning I went to the elevator to settle for the corn and I was still trying to account for the shortage of 300 bushels. The elevator man said no other crib had a shrinkage like that. Thinking back to December when the corn was sealed I remembered that the folding ruler that the sealer used had one or two lengths broken off of it. I decided that he had made an error in measuring the crib. I recalled that I had left the measuring etc. all to him because I was busy figuring out a way to raise money enough to meet the old mortgage and clear up the Federal Land Bank

Note on Sources

The Elmer G. Powers Diary (1931-1942) is in the Manuscript Collection of the Division of the State Historical Society in Iowa City, along with a parallel private diary kept by Powers during the 1920s and 1930s. Additional materials in the Powers Papers include an interview with Daniel L. Powers (E. G. P.'s son) and Lillian Lenore Powers Gonder (E. G. P.'s daughter), copies of correspondence, copies of family obituaries (including E. G. P.), and a few miscellaneous farm records. The fuller published version of the Powers Diary, H. Roger Grant and L. Edward Purcell (co-ed.), *Years of Struggle: The Farm Diary of Elmer G. Powers, 1931-1936* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1976) provides annotation of the excerpted portions of the text.

The sections of the diary for 1936 published here have been selected from the original. Individual entries have been shortened and many entries deleted entirely. Punctuation and grammar have been corrected for ease of reading.

Loan. So now it was apparent that the sealer was in error that amount, and I had borrowed money on 300 bushels of corn that I never had. It made a low rate of interest anyway.

I have watched numerous sales of corn at country elevators and never liked the grading system they used. My own corn this morning was made to grade so that I was paid 97 and $\frac{1}{2}$ cents for it instead of the \$1.00 $\frac{1}{2}$ I had rather expected to get for it.

Later in the forenoon I drove to the county seat and instead of paying off the corn loan, the loan I owed the bank and most of the land bank payment, I had to borrow all of the land bank [payment] and renew part of the local bank loans. The banker was very obliging and helped to plan to eventually get these things all paid.

This afternoon, here at home, I began to plan again for the things I hoped to do; to repair the buildings and get them painted and to plan for another year, for I can get through 1937 now. I wish everyone could do this well.

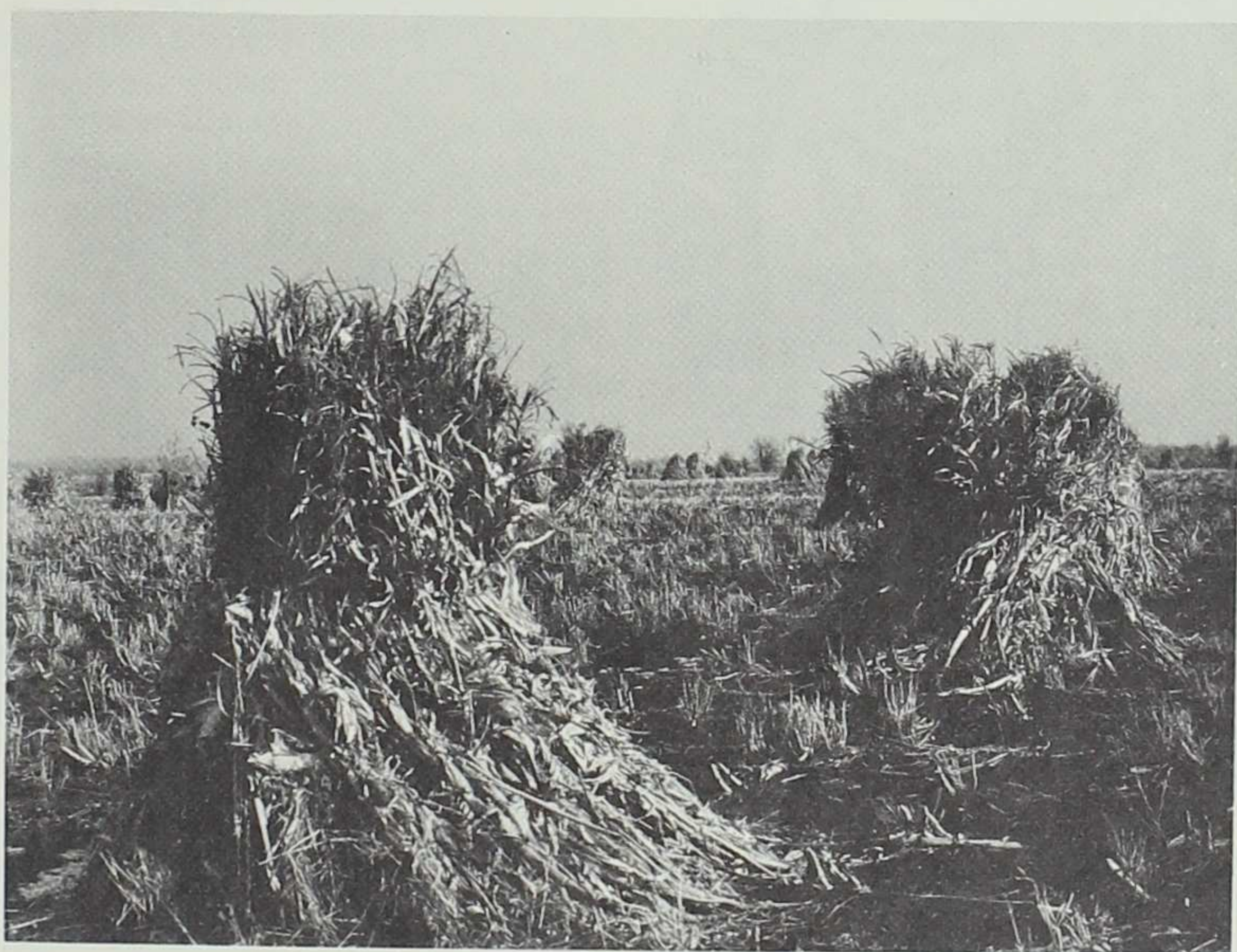
Following the corn harvest, the farming year began to wind down for Elmer. He noted the national election in November, but without much enthusiasm. Financial matters took most of his attention, and he began to show signs of growing anxiety about the nation. To his mind the Depression had created social divisions which he cloaked in terms of conspiracy and intentional ill-will. On November 26 he wrote: "The division between the two money classes each day becomes more and more apparent."

Despite hard times, Elmer always remained loyal to the land. He never faltered in his belief that farming was the most wholesome and worth-

while occupation on earth; however, by the mid-1930s he had become slightly cynical about nearly everything else. As he said in his diary entry for April 6, his twenty-eighth wedding anniversary: "If the weather, markets, folks we associate with etc. would be as fair to us as the soil has been we would have life very satisfactory." The year 1936 marked a psychological turning point for Elmer; his guarded optimism about the future of farming gave way to a persistent pessimism. Perhaps his struggle to hold on to the farm which had been in his family for three generations wore down his natural good spirits.

One problem which drew Elmer's ire was what he considered to be administrative bungling. He was happy to accept money from the federal government as relief, but he resented the lack of coordination between federal, state, and county agencies. By 1936 Elmer had come to depend on the cash from federal relief programs as a way to pay his mortgage and farm taxes. However, the timing of the relief checks did not coincide with the tax payment dates, and Elmer suffered embarrassment. In 1935, his farm was sold at a delinquent tax sale, and he was able to redeem it only after he got his relief check, several weeks later. In 1936, Elmer avoided sale of the farm, but only by making a special arrangement with the Boone County Treasurer. When Elmer received a federal payment of \$250.70 on December 11, all but \$33 went for taxes.

At last, however, the terrible year of 1936 came to an end. In his diary entry for December 20, Elmer provided a benediction: "The year that is drawing to a close is mentioned more frequently, by more folks, than any year I can remember of. The happenings of 1936 must have made a deep and lasting impression on many people and these happenings are still close in their minds." □



Work Projects Administration photo, 1930s.